

A Guilty Conscience

It Needs No Accuser

By RODMAN BIRCH

On my return trip from London my hand baggage was carried to my state room by a steward. Unrolling my rug what was my astonishment to find within its folds a large quantity of the finest grade of lace and within the folds of the lace a chamois bag full of jewels.

I examined the rug carefully and discovered that though the same color as mine—a dark blue—it was not so much worn. A close inspection of the shawl strap showed that it was not mine. It was plain that in the transition from the station to my stateroom my rug had been exchanged for this one. The only details of this theory I could supply were that the rug had been dumped together on the steamer deck and later carried to their supposed respective staterooms. The one that had come to me had no tag on it, which, considering its valuable contents, amazed me. Indeed, I was surprised that the owner should have permitted it to go out of his possession.

I rolled up the bundle as I had found it, strapped it and instead of going or deck went to the smoking room to think out the problem of its owner ship. I proceeded methodically and after the fashion of detectives. The fact that the package was not tagged indicated that the owner did not care to have his name on it—that is, he intended to keep it in his own possession. Evidently the goods were to be smuggled, and the smuggler on boarding the ship, finding himself suspected, had desired to temporarily get rid of it. Doubtless he had seen heaps of hand



I FELT SURE THAT HE WAS MY QUARRY. baggage on the deck and when unobserved had tossed it on one of these heaps. Then his attention had been distracted, and either he was unable to locate the pile on which he had thrown it or it was picked up and carried away before he could again get possession of it.

It remained for me to account of this theory for my not having both my own and this other rug in my possession. I theorized in this way: The smuggler having dropped his rug on my pile of hand baggage, finding an opportunity to take it up without being observed, had picked up mine instead of his own.

It was well satisfied with my explanation and, having settled the cause of the episode in my mind, began to think about the outcome. It struck me at once that there was enough in it to keep me interested all the way across. The smuggler having lost his property would take measures to recover it. What measures? I confess that were I in his place I would consider a search for my valuable like looking for a needle in a haystack. I, too, would be on the watch for him. Indeed, this phase of the question promised to be very interesting. If I found him and he was a good fellow I would return his property without asking any questions. If he acted disagreeably—well, I could be disagreeable too. I knew some of the customs men in New York and what I might do I could determine before meeting them.

I made a number of acquaintances on the steamer, and with one party—a gentleman named Stoneman, his wife and two daughters—I became quite intimate. They were wealthy and had been seeing Europe extensively. After pledging them to secrecy I told them that there was a matter I would confide to them which might interest them—a problem that I would like their assistance in solving. I then told them about the error which had thrown a valuable property into my possession and invited them to observe our fellow passengers with a view to determining the rightful possessor.

Mr. Stoneman didn't take to the matter at all, cautioning me that it might get me into trouble. His wife coincided with him in this opinion, and their daughter, though interested, did not show any disposition to take an active part in my investigations after her

parents' disapprobation of such a course.

However, the oldest Miss Stoneman, being of an age to be attracted by such a curious circumstance, the next day pointed out to me a man pacing the deck whom she said she thought might be the smuggler. She had been watching him, and he looked very uneasy. She was sure he had something on his mind. The moment I looked at him, I was of the same opinion. Moreover, he stared at me as I passed him. I wondered if he could know that I was in possession of the valuables.

After that Miss Stoneman and I, having a secret together, spent considerable time in each other's company, sitting on deck together. The man she had pointed out walked the deck much of the time, and whenever he passed us would look at us uneasily. I felt sure that he was my quarry. I asked Miss Stoneman how she came to light upon the man so quickly, and she said she didn't know herself. I told her it was that unaccountable power of intuition which women possess in lieu of the reasoning power of men.

But if the fellow knew that I had his property he took no steps, so far as I could see, to possess himself of it. Every time he passed me he looked at me harder than before, and I seemed to have a very disturbing effect upon him. One evening I approached the stern of the ship. Some one was looking over the taffrail, but I did not notice who he was. Suddenly he looked up at me. He was the smuggler.

"I can stand this no longer," he said. "I know you are from Scotland Yard, and I may as well give myself up first as last."

"How do you know that?" I asked, not wishing to commit myself.

"It was that young lady who put you on to me. It's wonderful how these women can know things."

"Well, are you ready to confess?"

"Will I gain anything by confession?"

"Certainly, I'll see to that."

"Well, I lost the money on the stock exchange."

This was a surprise, but I kept my countenance.

"Then it is all gone?"

"Every cent. I can't gain anything by restoration."

The plot was thickening. In looking for the owner of the property I held, I had stumbled on a criminal. I did not propose to mix myself up in this second affair, one was enough, so I said:

"My friend, you have made a mistake. I'm no Scotland Yard man, and I have no interest in your crime. Why have you been staring at me?"

"Why have you been staring at me?" he asked, with great apparent relief.

I did not satisfy him. He had a guilty conscience, which Miss Stoneman had observed, so the moment we looked at him curiously he took it for granted he had been spotted.

I told him I would not give him away for which he thanked me. I didn't think it prudent to intrust Miss Stoneman with his secret, so I told her that I had discovered that he was the wrong man.

Our last day of the voyage came, and I was at a loss to know what to do with the lace and the diamonds. I spoke to my confidante about my property, and she suggested that so long as I had nothing to fear from the customs officers I might carry the package about as it was. After doing so the rightful owner might claim it, and then it would be time enough to decide what action to take. I replied that the rug would probably be unrolled and examined by the customs officers, whereupon she offered to take the lace and diamonds ashore herself.

Since she seemed inclined to this plan I reluctantly consented to it, yet fearing that if she got into trouble I would be blamed. Her object seemed to be to serve me, though I fancied she supposed in case the property remained with me she would fall heir to a part of it for getting it through free of duty. I handed it over to her, and she must have concealed it well, for she took it through without being discovered.

The criminal who had mistaken me for a Scotland Yard man did not fare so well. Officers who had been cabled that he was on the steamer took him in charge as he left the vessel.

When I parted from the Stonemans the mother gave me a pressing invitation to call upon them in New York before they departed for home, which they expected to do in a few days after landing. I called on them at their hotel and was graciously received.

Since my attentions to Miss Stoneman on the steamer had been noticed, presently the others one by one excused themselves and left us alone together.

"Well," said the young lady, "have you discovered the owner of the property?"

"No one has applied for it."

"Probably not, since it is mine."

"Yours?"

"Yes."

I looked at her aghast. "You have no need to smuggle."

"It's the fascination of it. I was bound to get those things through free of duty. When we went aboard the ship I got a fright. I saw the man I pointed out to you looking at me while I was carrying my rug. I dropped it and failed to find it again. That's all I knew about it till you told us it had found its way into your stateroom."

"There were two of you," I said, laughing, "with a guilty conscience, though one was a thief, the other only a smuggler, which seems to be quite fashionable among the upper classes just now."

"So it seems."

There is nothing more to the story except that in time I married the girl who had fooled me. She has been fooling me ever since.



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A STRANGE LEGEND,

Origin of a Curious Custom Observed by Bulgarian Builders.

Nine master masons who were engaged in building a citadel in the time of the Volvold Neagoe found on returning to their work each morning that the portion of the wall which they had completed the day before had fallen to pieces during the night and was lying in a heap of ruins in the ditch. Manol of Carnea, the head mason, informed his comrades one morning that a voice from heaven had warned him in his sleep the night before that their labors would continue to come to naught unless they all swore on that very morning to immure in the structure the first woman, be it wife, mother, daughter or sister, who should arrive with the morning meal of one or either of them. They all took the oath, and the last man had hardly been sworn when Manol's own wife appeared, carrying her husband's breakfast. The oath was kept, and the woman, known in the legend as "Flora of the Fields," was murdered and her blood and flesh incorporated with the wall of masonry.

A curious practice of the Bulgarian masons (the above scene is laid in Bulgaria), which survives to this day, testifies to the vitality of the legend. To insure the solidity of the house they build they measure with a reed the shadow of the first person who passes after the digging of the foundation has been completed. When the foundation is commenced this reed is buried under the first rock, usually the cornerstone.

The Crop Failed.

The sharp wittedness of the Russian gypsies is illustrated by a story told in the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society. A gypsy induced a farmer to join him in sowing money, promising a large crop of rubles. Having first sown a comparatively small amount, they got back each morning their capital with some addition, much to the delight of the farmer. Then they sowed a big sum and got back—nothing. The farmer began to blame the gypsy for advising him to sow money. The gypsy answered, "Well, it's nobody's fault that there was a sharp frost early this morning."

The Ruling Passion.

Mrs. J. L. Story in her reminiscences tells of a lady relative who had all her life been afraid of damp sheets. When she was dying Mrs. Story entered the room, to find the fireplace barricaded with a large assortment of bed linen. She was having her winding sheet warmed.

"I never have lain in damp bed-clothes while I was alive," said the old lady in a feeble whisper, "and I'm not going to do it when I'm dead."

A Philanthropist.

"Pa," said little Willie, looking up from his paper, "what is a philanthropist?" "A philanthropist, my son," replied his wise pa, "is usually a man who spends his time getting other people to spend their money for charity."—Catholic Standard and Times.

Rough on His Rival. "Is he really your rival?"

"Yes."

"Great Scott! If I had a rival that looked like that man, do you know what I would do?"

"No."

"I'd give up the girl."—London Telegraph.

Good form

The Well Bred Voice.

One of the elementary laws of good manners prescribes that we shall practice self control, says Florence Howe Hall. Cultivated society goes a step further and demands of us personal refinement. Americans understand this very well so far as dress and outward appearance go. There is perhaps no other nation that pays so much attention to dress as we do. Our countrywomen are admired in Europe for their well made clothes, as well as for their own good looks.

But when they open their lips to speak, alas, all is changed! The harsh nasal tones jar most unpleasantly on the ear. The truth is we do not pay proper attention to the way in which we speak. We do aim at distinctness of utterance, and this we usually achieve. Speech should above all be intelligible, and Americans endeavor always to be understood. This is an excellent thing so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. Why should we be more slovenly in speech than we are in dress?

The woman who has her hands manicured, her hair and face massaged, but who utterly neglects the cultivation of her voice, has not a proper appreciation of values, as the artists say. She should take lessons in singing or in voice culture, and she should have for a text in her boudoir the lines: Her voice was ever soft, Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman.

When we hear Englishmen or Frenchmen talk it is evident that they have a respect and admiration for their own language. They try to pronounce it so that it will sound well. They seem to understand instinctively that beauty of speech is as great a pleasure to the ear as a beautiful object is to the eye.

If the American woman is wise she does not adopt the British peculiarities of intonation and accent. Nor does she endeavor to make her vocabulary agree with that of the English. She understands that our common language has developed along different lines in the two countries. "Apothecary" and "lawyer" are old Shakespearean words quite as good if not better than the modern British "chemist" and "barrister."

The endeavor to make oneself heard above the din of traffic and conversation is in part responsible for our natural harshness of utterance. At an afternoon tea, where the voices of the women soar higher and higher till they almost reach the screaming point, the vain effort to make themselves heard, the result is disastrous. The habit of calling up and down stairs is also very bad for the voice.

Entertaining Guests.

There are some strict rules indorsed by those who know what is "good form" and others who do not concerning the entertaining of a guest.

A hostess should not accept any invitation that does not include her guest, and she may with propriety (if cards of invitation are received not including a guest) let the prospective hostess know that an invitation is expected. This can be done by telephone or note, simply stating that "I have a young lady (or a man) friend visiting me and should like a card of invitation for her (or him) to your dinner (or ball or whatever) for such and such a date."

If there are callers who are not aware of the presence of a guest a hostess may say she has a friend visiting, then the caller asks to meet whoever it may be. An excellent plan and one generally adopted by those who entertain a great deal and are consequently invited out often is to give an afternoon "high tea," when simple refreshments are best form and everybody in the line of acquaintances invited to meet "Miss Dash."

In the case of a man guest the men of the family see that he has a chance of meeting other men. There may be an evening arranged as well as "bachelor" affairs, where he can be delightfully entertained.

It is good form to just inform a hostess when invitations are received to a dinner, a card party or an affair when special arrangements are to be necessary that one will bring a visiting guest. This is all that is needed.

If one has a reception or affair of any sort the hostess should see that her guest of honor, the one that is visiting her, meets every one present if possible. If a dance the guest should have the men brought to her to fill her dance card and the host sees that she is cared for in every way.

Also a hostess should defer to the wishes and plans of a guest. There may be friends the latter wishes to see that her entertainer is not acquainted with.

On Shaking Hands.

The woman who offers her hand upon accepting an introduction conveys thereby a sign of cordial welcome to the acquaintance, but in formally fashionable society none but the hostesses pursue this course. The incalculable of the head, a smile and a murmur of the name constitute a full recognition of an introduction in the eyes of many who regard their bearing as the expression of the best form. In a rather crowded drawing room this mode is to be commended, but at other times a woman, whose prerogative it is to take the initiative on this point, will not greatly err in almost invariably offering her hand.

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